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Theodore; My Blind Boy.
A Mother's Story.



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THEODORE: MY BLIND BOY.

A MOTHER'S STORY.

BY VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND.

THROUGH the long, pleasant Summer-days—through the long, weary Winter-nights, I worked on with a heart that kept itself at watch and prayer; worked with my slow, creeping needle and thread, that had to toil along so many weary seams, and through such endless rows of stitches for every dollar which I added to the small pile, on which was staked the one great hope, and purpose, and prayer of my life. And Theodore, my beautiful boy, my *blind* boy Theodore sat by me, with his sweet talk filling all the hours and helping me keep up the brave, cheerful tones that sometimes startled me; they came from a heart so full of darkness, and aching, and tears.

But my boy couldn't see into his mother's heart, thank God! he could only hear her voice, and that carried cheer and warmth to him, and so he sat in the sunshine and smiled, never tiring of asking me questions, and hearing me answer them, and so the little pile of dollars grew one by one—one by one!

There was one thing that was hardest of all to bear, and that was, the sight of the children, when they frolicked past our house every afternoon on their return from school. The sight of their happy faces, the sound of their loud, glad voices pierced me through and through, and I would turn from them and look at *my* pale, still boy, sitting in the sunshine, and wonder how God could so smite us—how He could give to the other children strong, brave fathers to shelter them in happy homes, and care for their slightest wants, while He had given to my blind boy only his frail mother—his frail mother with her needle!

One afternoon, when the children flocked by louder and merrier than usual, all these thoughts swept so bitterly over me, that my heart broke down under them—a low, quick groan which I could not quite stifle, tore itself up to my lips, and then the stitches all ran into one, and the work fell from my hands. Light as it was, my boy's quick ears caught the groan, and he came from the door, where he was sitting in the soft, Autumn sunlight, his pale face full of trouble and fear.

"What is the matter, mother?" he asked; and though I tried to turn my face away, he was too quick for me, and his hand swept over it, and he felt the great scalding tears on my cheeks. He understood in a moment. "It's because I'm blind, mother, and the other children can see."

I could not answer him. I gathered him right up to my heart and hugged him there, while the storm of sobs and tears would have its way.

Theodore did not cry, but his face was full of doubt and anguish.

"Do n't you think I shall see as well as they, some day?" he whispered, when I grew calmer.

"Mother hopes so, my precious darling. She don't give way like this very often, but her heart was weak once. We'll keep up bravely, and one of these days I shall have the other twenty dollars earned, and then we will go to the city and see the wonderful oculist there, who has restored the eyesight of so many who have been blind a great while longer than you, Theodore."

"It seems so long, so very long, mamma, since I saw the sunshine, or the small stars, or looked at you, mother," and he shook his head sorrowfully.

"It seems to me, too, a very, very long two years, darling; but you've been so brave, and patient, through it all, and such a comfort to your mother, that it has n't been half so hard; and you won't give way now?"

"I'll try not to," and a little smile flickered over his lips, sweet and sorrowful.

And then I read to him, for I would steal time out of every day to do this, and to walk out with him in the green fields, for I knew that the hardest burden which this blindness brought to my boy was, that it shut him off from his books—his books, which were his great and constant delight, which opened a new world to him, from whose green branches he gathered sweet blossoms and golden fruits.

Theodore was only twelve when the blindness came on him. He had a long, terrible fever, in which life battled for two weeks with death, and when God heard my prayers and the cold shadow passed away from our threshold, the fever had fallen into his eyes, and Theodore was blind. I could n't believe it for a long time; every morning I expected that he would tell me he caught a glimpse of the sunshine, as its bright tides flowed through the east window, by which he slept; but the days and the weeks wore on, and the old steadiness returned to his pulse, and the soft roundness to the pale cheeks, but the darkness did not fall away from him.

Ten years before his father had left me; he had gone to South America, as there was an opening there for him, to enter on some new business which promised to bring him a fortune; but, alas! the yellow fever clutched him a month before he was to sail home, and—they made his grave in the land of the stranger, and greedy and dishonest men possessed themselves of the small fortune he had acquired. So our little cottage,

where my husband brought me, a loving and happy bride, and which had been to me a little earthly paradise, was all that remained to me and to my boy, Theodore! And I loved him better, because his face was like that face which I should see no more till the morning of the resurrection; that face that had been suddenly struck down in its manly strength and beauty and laid under the long, wild grass, amid which my hands could never plant the sweet Spring violets or scatter every June with roses from the bush he had set by the bedroom window on *our* boy's first birthday!

Theodore had always been a fragile child, and his singular beauty had attracted the observation of strangers, from his infancy, and his blindness in no wise disfigured his face. The deep, gentian eyes, shaded by long lashes, had no blank, vacant expression to testify of their quenched light; and above them waved thick rings of chestnut hair. The face was delicate and very fair, and its smiles were bright as the winking of the Spring blossoms in the young meadow-grass.

Theodore had been a somewhat grave, yet a very happy boy; and though he was restless and nervous after the blindness came upon him, he bore it with sweet fortitude.

And for me—well, I stitched on, upheld by *one* hope during the long two years, which tasked every energy to earn seventy-five dollars, and then when the burden seemed too heavy and my heart fainted under it, I had the One Heart, to whom I carried it, who "bore all our sorrows," and sounded for us the mightiest deeps of human anguish—the one dear *Name* of which no trials can rob us, which only grows more precious as all others fail, our hope in life, our trust in death, our joy and glory through eternity, Jesus Christ.

Two full years had rounded themselves through their Summers and Winters, when I laid the last dollar to the little sum I had been hoarding so long, and two days later Theodore and I started for the city, fifty miles away, in which Dr. Palmer, the celebrated oculist, resided.

It was in the early Spring, and the purple violets and white anemones sprinkled the grass, and the young birds were jubilant with songs, and the air was fragrant with the breath of the Spring blossoms. But, God have pity upon that mother who shall ever carry a heart so tossed with hope and fear, as was mine when I walked with my blind boy's hand clinched tightly in mine, up the marble steps of the stately yellow brick dwelling, in which dwelt the man on whose verdict was to lie the bitterness of death or such promise and joy that it seemed to me my heart could not bear them.

I had concealed my fears respecting the result

as much as possible from Theodore, but he penetrated the real facts, notwithstanding my disguises, and grew flushed and agitated during the journey.

We waited a long, long time; it seemed interminable to me, for there were other patients with the Doctor, but at last he entered the room where we sat.

He was a tall, slender man, with a thin, serious face, and his hair had a thick sprinkling of gray.

I felt his first glance searched us both, and then he came forward and laid his hand quickly on Theodore's head, and said in a pleasant, brisk sort of voice, "This is my patient, I perceive." And then the words leaped right out of my heart, and I could not hold them back. "Yes, he is my boy, and he is all I've got in the world. O, Doctor, I've brought him to you. Can't you make him see?"

"I hope so; we'll try very hard for it," answered Doctor Palmer; and this time his voice was so kind and sympathetic, that I could have fallen right down on my knees and blessed him for the good it did me.

And then he went on, asking Theodore a few questions about his age, and his general health, and inquiring of me the circumstances and causes of his blindness, keeping his searching eyes on the boy's face all the time. At last he said,

"I must give his eyes a careful examination, before I can pronounce any decision. I will carry him into the next room, and it will not occupy more than ten minutes. You will try and be calm meanwhile, my dear madam."

It was very kind in him to say so; but those ten minutes of suspense—O, there is no year of my life that opens its doors in the past, and walks out with its joys and sorrows before my memory, which does not seem shorter to me than the time which I passed, walking up and down Dr. Palmer's chamber, and praying God to have pity upon me. At last the door opened, and the Doctor came in, and there was a pleasant smile about his lips.

"Mrs. Goodrich," he said, "I am much gratified to tell you, that I find a fair prospect of your boy's restoration to sight. Nay, that I consider it almost certain. It will require some care on my part, some patience on his, and much watchfulness on yours, but I have little fear as to the result in a short time." I sprang forward with a low cry of exceeding joy. What I said in the great sudden gladness of that hour, has entirely escaped me, saving the conclusion. "I am a widow and he is an orphan boy, but God in heaven make better reward to you, Doctor Palmer, than lands or gold, for the words you have just spoken to me!"

The Doctor did not speak, but he opened the door and led me into the room, where Theodore sat by the window.

His face was lifted up into a great joy, and shone with a great light. "O, mother," he cried out, "do you know that in a little while I shall see you again?"

And the words came up from my heart and knocked at my lips, but I could not speak them, and so I did all that a mother could; I gathered up my boy to my heart—my heart that was almost breaking under the great ocean of joy that had suddenly overflowed it.

At that moment a little girl came out of an alcove by the window in the farthest part of the room and stood before us. I see now the sweet, wistful face full of solicitude and sympathy, with its large, hazel eyes, its lips like the ripe currants that hang along the garden-fences in July, and its straying curls full of golden lights and brown shadows.

"Why, Ada, where did you come from?" asked Doctor Palmer.

"I've been sitting over there, papa," dipping her bright head in the direction of the alcove, "and I've heard all you've said to the boy. O, papa, you will make him see, won't you?"

"I hope to, my daughter, with God's blessing."

And in a little while it was all arranged. The Doctor was to operate on Theodore's eyes in three days, and within the following week he thought he could permit me to see my boy, for it would be necessary that Theodore should remain at his house for several days in perfect darkness and quiet after he had undergone the operation.

"Will it be very painful, Doctor?"

"Somewhat so, but brief; and I know this boy of yours has a brave heart, and will go through it courageously."

And Theodore's face confirmed the Doctor's words.

We were entire strangers in the city, but the Doctor found us a quiet boarding-place, and the three days which followed went over me like a song, and those long, slow, weary months when I sat stitching by the window, and envying the happy mothers whose children could see the blue sky and the earth asleep in the sunlight, seemed to me like a dream that is gone in the morning when one awaketh.

As for Theodore, he was calmer than I, but full of courage and hope; and we passed these days talking of all the blessed things he would see and do when his eyesight was once more restored to him.

And all Theodore's conversation ended with the same hope and purpose: "I shall get back to

my books again, and, O mother! how I *shall* study then!"

The third day Theodore went from me, and five days later Doctor Palmer's summons came to me.

Theodore sat in a large arm-chair, in a darkened room, with a bandage over his eyes, and near him stood the little girl with the brown and golden hair, who had slipped in every day to bring him her cheer and sympathy. The Doctor removed carefully the bandage from the boy's eyes, and I watched him with a heart which seemed to stand still as I gazed.

"Now look up, Theodore, and tell me if you can see your mother."

He looked up very eagerly, then the glad, full answer came in a moment: "Yes, mother, I can see your face; not very plain, but well enough to know it any where!"

What *I* did—what *they* did, I don't know, but I'm certain that no eyes in that room were without tears for a time, and that it was not long before Ada Palmer, in her great joy, threw her arms about Theodore's neck, and cried, "I'm so glad, so very glad that you are not blind any more!"

"Every thing promises nicely," said the cheerful voice of the Doctor, as he bandaged the eyes—the no longer *blind* eyes of my boy, Theodore Goodrich.

The following week I returned home. It was arranged that Theodore should remain with the Doctor three months, at the end of which time the latter believed his eyesight might be fully restored.

What a happy heart I carried to that lonely home—a heart that kept tune with the Spring as she walked full of grace and beauty into the arms of the Summer!

In two months I received Theodore's first letter. What glad tears blistered the few precious lines, God knows! Four weeks later he came to me *with eyesight entirely restored*.

And a little later, when the first great shock of joy had subsided, he placed in my hands a note from the Doctor, inclosing the seventy-five dollars, which had "cost two years of my life." God remember it when the great seals are broken and the books are opened!

Eight years had gone, and in the heart of a great city, among a mighty crowd, which filled the vast church to overflowing, I looked once more upon my boy.

Thousands of other eyes were fastened upon him, for he was the valedictorian of his class. Through much of struggle and many privations, he had made his way through college, and achieved the great hope of his youth.

When he ceased speaking women, whose beauty had blossomed in every climate, rained from the galleries their fragrant bouquets upon him, and noble men beneath honored him with enthusiastic plaudits; but not far apart from me sat, in the blossoming of her years, a maiden who brought no offering of flowers to the speaker.

Very fair she looked even amid all the grace and the beauty which shone around her, as she sat with the light and the shadow in her hair, and her hazel eyes full of tender triumph, and her lips parted with a smile of tremulous gladness—a smile which suddenly faded into seriousness as the speaker came toward her, while she bowed her head quickly under a still shower of tears. I knew where the thoughts of Ada Palmer, the betrothed wife of Theodore Goodrich, had gone, and I knew, as he stood by her side and looked down on her with a face which had rounded out from its boyish beauty into manly strength and seriousness, that my boy's thoughts had clasped Ada's, and gone back through its long, long path of eight years to the day when the first gleam of his mother's face broke on his darkened eyes.

And for me—my thoughts went beyond theirs to those two years of slow toil and patience, and weary heartache, when I sat by the window in my little cottage home feeding my heart with one hope through the dreary nights and days, and then my thoughts went up to God with great thanksgiving for all the joy of these latter days, and because that he whose young manhood was so full of promise, who had dedicated his life to the glory of God and the help of his fellow-man, and whose work thus far had been crowned with that *best* success which is the only *true* one, was he who had once been "*Theodore, my blind boy!*"

THE USEFUL CHILD.

BY SHEELAH.

LOULIE was very fond of reading, and no one could be happier than she now was, as, coiled up on the sofa in her papa's study, one Saturday morning, she pored over a pretty book which had been given her the previous day. She had just reached a most interesting part of the story when Georgie was heard crying on the stairs, and "papa" looked up from his writing with an exclamation of inquiry. Loulie did not wait even to finish the paragraph she was reading, but, hastily placing a mark, laid down her book, and ran lightly from the room.

"What is the matter, Georgie?" she asked, as she approached her little brother, and put her arm around him.

"I don't know," was the sobbing reply; "I want something to play with."

It was one of those gloomy, wet days, when every thing looks dull, indoors and out, and the little boy was weary and dispirited.

"Never mind, Georgie, I'll play with you," said his sister, cheerfully, as she led him toward the nursery.

"I was wishing for you, Loulie," said the nurse, as the children entered the room; "Georgie is so cross, he has been quarreling with Jennie so that the baby couldn't sleep, and your mamma has got a bad headache."

"Poor mamma!" said Loulie. "Well, Ellen, Georgie will be good now; I'll stay and play with him. Let me see; what shall we do, Georgie? shall we make a kite?"

"No! I can't fly a kite in the rain."

"True! but we can be making it, and have it ready to fly when the rain is over."

"So we can," said the little boy, beginning to brighten up.

"And me, too!" said Jennie, throwing down her doll and running toward them.

"No, now, Jennie, you can't help us," said Georgie.

"Well, but she can look on," answered Loulie, "and that will amuse her just as well. And now we must speak very easy, for Ellen wants baby to sleep."

Then Loulie went very softly to the closet, and got a piece of drugget that was kept for such purposes, spread it in a part of the room farthest from the baby's cot, and seating her little brother and sister on opposite sides of it, told them that they must keep very still, and think what shape the kite must be while she got the things to make it. She then quietly left the room, went to a drawer in the pantry where waste paper was kept and broken pieces of twine, and took enough of each for her purpose. Then she ran to the kitchen, and asked Kitty to make her a little paste, and send it to the nursery, whither she hastened back just in time to prevent Georgie from getting restless again. To Ellen she now applied for some scraps of whalebone or reed; and having got her little scissors and paint-box, she was soon seated on the drugget, earnestly engaged in kite-making.

Loulie had learned to make kites by assisting her elder brother, Henry; and now, though the rain poured down as fast as ever, and the day was still dark and dreary, the baby sweetly slept, "mamma" rested her aching head, and "papa" continued his writing undisturbed, for Georgie was quiet and happy, helping to make a new kite. And a very pretty kite it was when finished, with its painted face, and fringed knobs in

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